THE ASIAN AGE

NEW DELHI WEDNESDAY 18 MARCH 2020

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MPs should be doing their work as nation faces scare, session not to be cut: PM

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Former US vice-president Joe Biden wins Washington state primary

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WWE wrestler Nikki Bella denies her cryptic tweet was in reference to John Cena

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WINDOWS

Dubai's Burj Khalifa is lit up in the colours of the Italian flag on Monday with the message "we are with you" as a sign of solidarity with Italy. — *AFP*

CAA doesn't violate fundamental rights: Centre to top court

New Delhi: The Centre on Tuesday told the Supreme Court that the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) does not violate any fundamental right. The Central government, in its 129-page affidavit in response to the pleas challenging the constitutional validity of CAA, termed the legislation legal and asserted that there was no question of it violating constitutional morality.

Full report on Page 3

LS nod to change in abortion law

New Delhi: The Lok Sabha on Tuesday passed a bill which seeks to extend the upper limit for permitting abortions from the present 20 to 24 weeks for "special categories of women" which include rape survivors, victims of incest, differently-abled and minors.

Full report on Page 3

Jumbo Himachal PCC announced

New Delhi: Congress chief Sonia Gandhi on Tuesday announced a new jumbo PCC for Himachal Pradesh with 19 vice-presidents, 19 general secretaries and 69 secretaries. The Congress chief also set up a 44 member executive committee which includes all top leaders of the state. — *PTI*

COUNTERPOINT

It will not affect the people... many are working from home!

WEATHER

Max: 29°C
Min: 17°C
RH: 45%
Rainfall: Nil

Forecast: Sunny

ASTROGUIDE

Vikari: Uttarayana
Tithi: Phalguna Bahula Dasami till 4.26 am (Thursday)
Star: Purvashada till 1.03 pm
Varjyam: 9.39 pm to 11.22 pm
Durmuhurtam: 12 noon to 12.48 pm
Rahukalam: 12 noon to 1.30 pm
SUNSET TODAY 6.31 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.27 AM
MOONRISE TOMORROW 2.40 AM
MOONSET TODAY 1.12 PM

■ No community transmission seen yet; entry ban from 3 more nations

C-virus count 138, with one more death in Maha; shutdowns rising

VINEETA PANDEY with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, MARCH 17

One more death was reported from Maharashtra on Tuesday, taking the total number of deaths to three in India due to the novel coronavirus outbreak, while the number of positive cases jumped from 114 to 138 in the past 24 hours. Out of these, 121 are active cases while 14 persons have been cured.

The 63-year-old man from Maharashtra had a history of travel to Dubai and had not disclosed this to the doctors treating him at a private hospital. Maharashtra health minister Rajesh Tope said the exact cause for his death was still being ascertained as the person was also suffering from various other ailments and later had tested positive for Covid-19.

The total number of cases include 24 foreign citizens. Among the new cases are two people from Noida and two persons who returned from Italy this week and were staying at an ITBP quarantine facility.

Delhi has so far reported eight positive cases while Uttar Pradesh has recorded 15, including one foreigner. Maharashtra has 39 cases, including three foreigners, while Kerala has 26 cases, which includes two foreign nationals. Haryana reported 15, including 14 foreigners, Karnataka 11, Ladakh reported six, Jammu and Kashmir three, Telangana five, including two foreigners, Rajasthan four, including two foreigners. Tamil Nadu, Uttarakhand, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and Punjab have reported one case each.

Meanwhile, West Bengal reported its first case on Tuesday. An 18-year-old Kolkata resident who returned from London on March 15 has been admitted to

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A group of French nationals, who were unable to return to their country following a complete shutdown, at Chennai International Airport on Tuesday. — *PTI*

CORONA UPDATE

- Govt issues advisories asking all offices to have thermal scanners, sanitizers and minimising physical contact with people
- DGCA asks airlines to disinfect planes every 24 hours, place hand sanitizers in lavatories
- 2 Italy-returned ITBP quarantine inmates test positive
- To regulate crowds, Railway zones hike price of platform tickets from ₹10 to ₹50
- Entry of passengers from Afghanistan, Philippines and Malaysia banned
- Health ministry recommends use of anti-HIV drug combinations Lopinavir and Ritonavir on a case-to-case basis
- Number of testing labs increased from 52 to 125 as selected pvt labs allowed to conduct tests as per ICMR norms and free of cost
- Guidelines issued on dead body disposal
- Union minister V. Muraleedharan tests negative, but places self under home quarantine after visiting a medical institute whose hospital later reported a Covid case

UK Indians rush for flights home before deadline

ADITI KHANNA
LONDON, MARCH 17

A mad dash for emergency visas and flights was witnessed on Tuesday as Indians in the UK began racing against time before the 1200 GMT deadline for India's travel ban from Britain and Europe kicks in on Wednesday, as part of measures to tackle the coronavirus pandemic.

India on Monday banned the entry of passengers from Europe, Turkey and the UK from March 18 till March 31 to contain the spread of the deadly virus.

The Indian high commission in London was inundated with calls and messages on social media from Indians seeking clarifications on the latest travel advisory and also support for emergency visas.

"If you are travelling before the deadline of 1200hrs GMT on 18th March there should not be any problem," the Indian high commission said in response to a flurry of queries on social media.

"The cut-off date and time is for the port of departure," it clarified.

People caught up in the chaos range from Indian nationals on tourist as well as student visas set to expire within days or weeks, those on student visas just keen to be back home with loved ones and also those desperate to travel due to a family emergency.

"The Chinese students I spoke to said that the Chinese embassy spoke to the UK immigration

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▸ Some Indians from Philippines trying to return to India to beat deadline stuck in Kuala Lumpur. AirAsia flights to Delhi, Vizag okayed to rescue stranded.

Centre allows accredited pvt labs to also do Covid-19 tests

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 17

The government on Tuesday decided to increase the number of testing labs from 52 to 125 by allowing accredited private labs also to conduct Covid-related tests. The government has made it clear that the tests should be done only when prescribed by a qualified physician, as per ICMR-NIV norms, and free of cost.

ICMR said that it will share the standard operating procedures for testing and provide positive controls for establishing the test as soon as the concerned private laboratory procures the primers, probes and reagents. Guidelines have also been issued for Dead Body Management towa-rds standard precautions and infection prevention.

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250 Indians in Iran test +ve for coronavirus

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 17

About 250 Indians in Iran have reported to be tested positive for Covid-19 during a pre-embarkment test conducted by Indian doctors in Qom, the epicentre of outbreak in the country. The number of Covid-19 cases in Iran are fast multiplying with over 850 live cases and 129 fatalities so far.

However, while MEA officials on Tuesday acknowledged that there were positive cases of Indians in Iran they did not give the exact numbers.

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CLIFFHANGER IN BHOPAL

CM ducks floor test again, SC to take a call today

22 rebel MLAs: We're not captives

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, MARCH 17

The high-octane political drama in Madhya Pradesh triggered by the exit of veteran leader Jyotiraditya Scindia from the Congress and the resignation of 22 Congress MLAs from the Assembly last fortnight, continued on Tuesday with chief minister Kamal Nath disregarding governor Lalji Tandon's fresh directive to face a floor test in the Assembly.

This was the second time in the past 24 hours that Mr Nath has ignored a gubernatorial directive to face a floor test to prove his government's majority.

The chief minister, who shot off a letter to the governor on Tuesday morning justifying his decision to skip the trust vote again, took strong exception to Mr Tandon's warning that he would declare his government to be in a minority if he ducked the floor test this time too. "It will be unconstitutional since it (saying his government is in a minority) is baseless", Mr Nath said.

Earlier on Monday, the governor set the fresh date of March 17 for the Kamal Nath government to face a trust vote after his earlier directive to the CM to hold the floor test in the Assembly on Monday to prove his majority was given a go-by.

The governor, while issuing a fresh directive to hold the floor test on Tuesday, warned it would be deemed the Kamal Nath government had been reduced to a minority if the CM failed to face floor test on the day.

Replying to the governor's fresh missive, Mr Nath on Tuesday took refuge in coronavirus

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SC issues notices to Nath, Speaker

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 15

The Supreme Court on Tuesday sought a response from Madhya Pradesh Assembly Speaker N.P. Prajapati and chief minister Kamal Nath on a plea by former CM Shivraj Singh Chouhan seeking an immediate floor test after 22 Congress MLAs left the party along with Jyotiraditya Scindia.

Noting the "urgency of the situation", a bench of Justices D.Y. Chandrachud and Hemant Gupta issued a short notice and directed that a further hearing in the matter would take place on Wednesday at 10.30 am.

Justice Chandrachud said "perhaps the appropriate thing would be for us to issue a short notice and hear this tomorrow" as senior counsel Mukul Rohatgi told the court that "they (respondents Speaker and CM) have not appeared because this way they gain a day".

Mr Rohatgi, appearing for Mr Chouhan, told the court the "rationale in this case is that a floor test is needed, and usually the other side appears in such cases".

As the court issued

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▸ MP Cong moves SC, seeks access to its rebel MLAs

Huge row erupts on ex-CJI Gogoi's nomination to RS

New Delhi/Guwahati, March 17: A row erupted on Tuesday over the nomination of former Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi to the Rajya Sabha with the Congress and other Opposition parties alleging that the "brazen action" by the government subsumes the independence of the judiciary.

As the Opposition parties raised questions, a former Supreme Court judge Kurian Joseph expressed surprise and said Justice Gogoi's acceptance of the nomination has shaken the confidence of the common man on the independence of judiciary.

Justice Joseph when asked by newsmen to give his reaction alleged that Justice Gogoi has "compromised noble principles" on the independence and impartiality of judiciary. Justice Joseph along with Justice Gogoi, Justice J. Chelameswar and Justice Madan B. Lokur had publicly questioned the leadership of the then CJI Dipak Misra

in an unprecedented press conference,

Justice Gogoi, who retired in November last year, said he would speak in detail about accepting the nomination after he takes oath.

"Let me first take oath, then I will speak in detail to the media why I accepted this and why I am going to Rajya Sabha," he told reporters in Guwahati.

On the criticism of his nomination, Justice Gogoi told a local television channel in Guwahati, "I have accepted the offer of the nomination to the Rajya Sabha because of a strong conviction that the legislature and judiciary must at some point of time work together for nation-building."

"My presence in Parliament will be an opportunity to project the views of the judiciary before the legislature and vice versa," he said.

— *PTI*

Women officers in Navy win battle

Top court rules they can get permanent commission, like men

PARMOD KUMAR
NEW DELHI, MARCH 17

Holding that the "battle for gender equality is about confronting the battles of the mind", the Supreme Court on Tuesday ruled that women short service commission officers in the Indian Navy would be eligible for the grant of permanent commissions and gave the government three months time to comply with its directions.

Rejecting the various reservations pointed out by the "decision makers and administrators" against the grant of permanent commission to women short service commission officers in the Navy, a bench of Justices D.Y. Charndrachud and Ajay Rastogi said: "A hundred and one excuses are no answer to the constitutional entitlement to dignity, which attaches to every individual irrespective of gender, to fair and equal conditions of work and to a level playing field."

Noting that history was replete with examples where women have been denied their "just entitlements under the law and the right to fair and equal treatment in the workplace", the court said: "A level playing field ensures that women have the opportunity to overcome their histories of discrimination with the surest of responses based on their competence, ability and performance."

The court described as "specious reasons" that sailing duties can't be given to SSC women officers as the Russian-made vessels don't have toilets for them.

"In the context of the armed forces, specious reasons have been advanced by the decision makers and administrators. They range from physiology, motherhood and physical attributes to

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Europe locks down, WHO for 'bold action'

Paris, March 17: European countries moved into near total lockdown on Tuesday in a bid to halt the rapid spread of the deadly coronavirus.

The World Health Organisation called for the "boldest actions" against the pandemic on the continent, the outbreak's new epicentre.

From France to Germany to Spain, millions were confined to their homes as shops and restaurants closed and borders were sealed, while European leaders edged towards banning non-essential travel to the continent. The draconian measures, never before seen in peacetime, have upended society and roiled financial markets, prompting governments to roll out emergency economic measures as fears mount of a global recession. The sports world has been hammered too, with the Euro 2020 becoming the latest tournament to be postponed and major doubts lingering over the fate of the Tokyo Summer Olympics.

The outbreak, which first emerged in China late last year, has quickly marched across the globe, infecting more than 180,000 people and killing over 7,000.

Asian hotspots China and South Korea have seen new infections and deaths level out in recent weeks — China reported just one new domestic case on Tuesday — but numbers are ballooning across Europe, with Italy, Spain and France especially hard hit.

Africa, with its fragile healthcare systems, is also seeing a steady rise in cases. — *AFP*

Judge pulls up lawyer, denies Nirbhaya case convict's plea

SANJAY KAW
NEW DELHI, MARCH 17

A Delhi court on Tuesday dismissed the plea by Mukesh Singh, one of four Nirbhaya gangrape-murder convicts, seeking quashing of his death penalty, and asked the Bar Council to give appropriate sensitisation to his counsel.

Expressing anguish over the "callous" way in which the application was moved, additional sessions judge Dharmender Rana said an advocate should not resort to all kinds of "schemes and stratagems" to procure relief.

The court said lawyer M.L. Sharma, appearing for Singh, not only made a false claim before the court but also failed to discharge his duties as a counsel to bring out all the facts. Opposing Mukesh's petition, the prosecution said it was frivolous and devoid of any merit, and a mischievous bid to stall execution of the death sentence on March 20.

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